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## THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

BY

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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31 March 1989

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	11
MAP OF GUATEMALA.....	iii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. WHY THE INSURGENCY?.....	4
Early Guatemalan History.....	4
The 1944 Revolution.....	5
III. THE EARLY INSURGENTS.....	10
The Insurgent Strategy.....	10
The Government Strategy.....	11
Conclusions.....	13
IV. INSURGENTS-THE SECOND GENERATION .....	15
The Insurgents.....	15
The Extreme Right.....	18
The Government.....	19
The Strategy.....	20
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	32

# ABSTRACT

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For more than two decades, the government of another Central American country, Guatemala, has been fighting an insurgency. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with some assistance from the United States, Guatemala was able to quash the insurgents. However, the insurgency rekindled in the mid 1970s. Yet, even while the insurgency gained strength, in 1977 the government of Guatemala rejected further United States aid because it considered President Carter's demands to improve human rights to be meddling in the country's internal affairs. Because the Guatemalan government was able to effectively counter the insurgency with little outside aid, this study reviews the political, social and economic events around which the insurgency developed, examines the Guatemalan strategy to counter the insurgency, and recommends the strategies that others might use to counter future insurgencies.



NOTE—Names of department capitals are the same as those of departments unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 1. Administrative Divisions (Departments) and Capitals, 1983

# THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the last decade (1973-1983), Counterinsurgency (CI) and Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) became "nonsubjects" in the Army school system. During this same period drastic cuts were made in the number of advisory personnel in Latin America, and Military Assistance Advisory Groups and military missions were reduced to caretaker status....and the U.S. Army returned to the conventional preoccupation with Europe and the Fulda Gap. (1)

In the 1980s the United States' interest in Low Intensity Conflict was rekindled. Soon after assuming office, President Reagan clearly signaled his support to those friendly nations fighting Communist backed insurgencies by his vocal and steadfast support of the Salvadoran Government. Reagan's Secretary of State, George Schultz, unequivocally stated the Administration's position when he said that "LIC is the prime challenge the United States will face in this century." (2) However, the Legislative Branch was at first reluctant to approve the Administration's requested funding of the Salvadorans' counterinsurgency efforts, citing their concern about the lack of Salvadoran improvements in the areas of human rights and democratization. They also voiced strong concern that support of any counterinsurgency would lead to another costly mistake, such as Vietnam. Yet, compromises were reached, and Congress did come to support the Salvadoran Government, if not exactly in the manner the President requested.

However, just a few years later Congress seemed to agree with Secretary Schultz, when, charging the Department of Defense of moving



too slowly to meet the threat from the lower end of the spectrum of conflict, it directed the post of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, and a Special Operations Command be established.

By 1989 the Army had fielded a new divisional organization, the Light Infantry Division, which was justified, in part, because of its deployability and increased utility in LIC. Also, the force structure, manning levels, and funding for Special Operations units were significantly increased. As further evidence of the Army's interest in LIC, that Service's 1989 Posture Statement devotes twice the space describing how it prepares for LIC than it devotes to describing how it prepares to fight on the high intensity battlefield. (3)

Yet, despite the renewed concerns about the challenges of LIC, and the resulting U.S. initiatives to strengthen its LIC capable forces, American combat forces have not been used to help our friends counter an insurgency during this decade. Instead, we have provided funds, advisors and trainers. Both the President and Congress agreed that our advisors in El Salvador would not engage in combat. This was such a touchy issue that there were even questions about the policy allowing them to carry weapons for self defense.

Then if U.S. military personnel are to be used first as advisors and trainers, and rarely, if ever, in direct combat against insurgent forces, how then can one best prepare for these missions. One answer must be the study of how other countries have successfully countered insurgent threats.

Thus, the idea for this study of the Guatemalans' fight against their insurgents was conceived. I considered this to be a worthwhile endeavor because I wanted to test Linda Robinson's statement that, "unlike its Salvadoran counterpart, the Guatemalan army has won its war - and without U.S. aid." (4)

In this study I will first briefly review the political, social, and economic events responsible for spawning the insurgency; second, I will investigate the Guatemalan strategy to counter the insurgents, and discuss its implementation; and finally I will recommend those strategies which others might find useful to counter future insurgencies.

#### ENDNOTES

1. John Waghelstein, COL, El Salvador: Observations and Experiences in Counterinsurgency, p. vii.

2. Fredrick Hartman and Robert Wendzel, Defending America's Security, p. 312.

3. John O. Marsh, Jr. and Carl E. Vuono, Joint Report of the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army to the Congress on the FY 1989 Army Budget Request, pp. 9-11.

4. Linda Robinson, "Peace in Central America?," Foreign Affairs, February 1988, p. 603.

# THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

## Chapter II

### WHY THE INSURGENCY?

Most insurgencies are caused by real or perceived social injustices. USAWC International Fellow from a country with an active insurgency.

### EARLY GUATEMALAN HISTORY

When Pedro de Alvarado, a Spanish conquistador, marched from Mexico into Guatemala in 1523 with a mandate to conquer the region for Spain, he entered an area that had contained centers of the Mayan civilization, an advanced culture noted for its cities, astronomy, mathematics, architecture and sculpture. However, Alvarado found a society in decline, which he soon conquered. (1)

The conquering Spanish were granted tracts of land which they developed, with the help of enslaved Indians, into large plantations whose main crops were grown for export. All the administrative posts were held by the people of Spanish descent and the Indians remained either enslaved, as sustenance farmers, or as laborers forced to work on the plantations or on church lands as tribute. (2)

The society remained basically unchanged in the centuries after the Spanish conquest until after World War II. Political and economic power was held by the large landholders, who, allied with military officers, the leaders of the Catholic Church and representatives of a few foreign corporations, controlled an underdeveloped, agricultural society that either exploited or ignored the Indians. The ruling landowners, about two percent of the total, owned more than sixty percent of the cultivated land while two-thirds of the remaining

landowners held title to only ten percent of the arable land. (3) Deep racial and social divisions existed. (4)

Even after Independence from Spain in the early 1820s, there were few societal or economic changes which caused a greater sharing of either power or wealth. The constitution adopted in 1879, lasted for 66 years. However, its guarantees of human rights, individual liberties, separation of church and state, and popular elections were more often ignored than honored. Yet the framer of the constitution, President Justo Rufino Barrios, a staunch anticleric, did succeed in reducing the power of the Church. He expropriated Church lands and some lands owned by Indian villages. During this period debt peonage was instituted, a practice that further disadvantaged the Indians. (5)

#### THE 1944 REVOLUTION

In 1944 the latest in a series of "strong man" rulers, General Fredrico Ponce Viades, was forced to resign after two young army officers, Major Francisco Arana and Captain Jacobo Arbenz, seized power. (6) They formed a junta with Jorge Toriello, a businessman acting as a representative for the civilian revolutionary leaders. (7) A liberal constitution was developed in 1945 which reestablished civil rights, limited presidential power and extended suffrage to both illiterate males and literate females. (8)

Elected president in what was considered at the time the freest election Guatemala had ever experienced, a former professor of philosophy, Dr. Juan José Arévalo, assumed office in March, 1945. (9) During his term (1945-1951) he used his progressive mandate to implement many societal changes. For instance, vagrancy laws and

other types of forced labor laws were abolished, a minimum wage was instituted and one-third of the budget was allocated to social welfare expenditures. In addition, workers were given the right to strike and organize unions. Also, foreign businesses were pressured to abide by the new labor laws. (10) The right to form political parties was expanded so that even a communist group, the Communist Party of Guatemala, was accorded legal status in 1952. (11)

Yet, while his reform program was lauded because of its efforts to shake up the oligarchy and to help the downtrodden Indians, it was unable to bring about these reforms without concerning Washington. (12) For the United States saw Guatemala as a communist beachhead in the hemisphere, and feared the nationalization of American holdings, in particular those of the United Fruit Company (UFCO). (13)

The next constitutionally elected president, Jacobo Arbenz, focused on land reform as a way to make idle lands available to any farmer for a rent of five percent of the annual production. Even Arbenz and members of his cabinet allowed their lands to be bought by the state as required by the new laws. (14) Yet after a total of over 2.2 million acres had been bought and distributed to the landless poor, the UFCO protested when 413,000 of its uncultivated acres were bought for their tax value. (15) The United States government then entered the fray, condemning the Arbenz government as communist. (16) Others disagreed with this charge, including Peter Calvert, the British author who declared:

The Company had already taken advantage of the prevailing fear about communism to brand Arbenz's government as communist. This it certainly was not. There were

communists in the Guatemalan public life, but they had no position in government of any significance, and there was in any case a wide range of opinions in the government. (17)

Continuing attacks on UFCO by charging it was an exploiting monopoly, the Guatemalan government then turned to Czechoslovakia for a supply of needed arms. Guatemala did this after an arms embargo had been established by the United States and Britain, and after having been denied arms by several other noncommunist countries. (18) In response, the United States government then delivered arms publicly to Nicaragua and Honduras, and covertly to Colonel Castillo Armas, a Guatemalan officer who had earlier fled Guatemala after attempting a coup. (19) Colonel Armas, who then was training an army in order to invade Guatemala and seize power, was reportedly being financed and supported by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. In June of 1954, his army invaded Guatemala, driving President Arbenz into exile. (20) The overthrow of the reformist Arbenz regime, argues the author Vincente Collazo-Davilla, is the event many both inside and outside of Guatemala use to mark the beginning of the Guatemalan insurgency. (21)

After seizing power, Colonel Armas was "elected" president. He quickly began to reverse the previous regime's reforms. During this counterrevolution he revised the liberal constitution, abolished labor unions, returned most of the expropriated lands to their former owners, outlawed left-wing parties, and disenfranchised the illiterates. In summary, Guatemala was again under "strong man" rule. (22)

However, this counterrevolution reinstated the rule of the army, not rule by the business elites, except where their interests were

similar to those of the Army. (23)

On November 13, 1960, a group of Guatemalan Army officers staged a coup against Armas' successor, General Ydígoras Fuentes. Their avowed reasons were to, in their words: end government corruption; end corruption in the army; and to end the stain on the national honor caused by the training of Cuban exiles in Guatemala by the United States. (24) The coup failed, but many of its veterans, including Lieutenant Marco Antonio Yon Sosa who had studied counterinsurgency at the United States Army School of the Americas in Panama, and Lieutenant Luis Turcios Lima who had attended the United States Army Ranger school at Fort Benning, Georgia, fled the country. However, they were soon to return to become leaders of an insurgency. (25)

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3. Paul A. Jureidini, et.al., Casebook On Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: 23 Summary Accounts, p. 105.

4. Richard Millett, "Guatemala: Progress and Paralysis," Current History, March 1985, p. 109.

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6. Peter Calvert, Guatemalan Insurgency and American Security, p. 4.

7. Ibid.

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11. Ibid., p. 25.
12. Walter La Feber, "The Burdens of the Past," in Central America: Anatomy of a Conflict, ed. by Robert S. Leiken, p. 57.
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14. Calvert, p. 5.
15. Max Gordon, "A Case History of U.S. Subversion," in Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History, ed. by Jonathan L. Fried, et. al. p. 55.
16. Kenneth F. Johnson, Guatemala: From Terrorism to Terror, p. 2.
17. Calvert, p. 5.
18. Ibid., .5-6.
19. Ibid., p. 6.
20. Ibid.
21. Vincente Collazo-Davila, "The Guatemalan Insurrection," in Insurgency in the Modern World, ed. by Bard E. O'Neil, et. al., p. 109.
22. U.S. Department of the Army, DA Pam 550-78, pp. 29-30.
23. Calvert, p. 6.
24. Vincente Collazo-Davila, p. 110.
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# THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER III

### THE EARLY INSURGENTS

The 6th of February, 1962, marks the conscious beginning of guerrilla warfare in our country, in the sense of an armed struggle taking place in the countryside, with political and social support of the peasantry, initially carried out by a small, unsophisticated, irregular military force. A Guatemalan insurgent leader. (1)

### THE INSURGENT STRATEGY

Back in Guatemala, Yon Sosa, Turcios Lima and some of their friends who had participated in the failed 1960 coup grew tired of waiting for another coup. Moving to the mountains in the Department of Izabal in eastern Guatemala, they began small military operations in February, 1962. However, after suffering several defeats and learning that supportive student demonstrations had been quashed, they moved back to Guatemala City to hide and regroup. (2)

After visiting Cuba in 1962, the insurgent leaders returned to Izabal and Zacapa Departments in 1963, where they concentrated on politicizing and organizing the peasants. Resuming small scale attacks and ambushes against police and military forces in 1965, they also conducted a number of sensational political kidnappings and assassinated the deputy Minister of Defense and the chief of the U.S. Military Mission. (3)

In response to an effective government counterinsurgency campaign in late 1966 and 1967, the insurgents again fled to Guatemala City, where as urban terrorists they "...perfected their techniques in both

political assassination and kidnaping to the point that for several years it appeared the government was incapable of interfering with their operations". (4)

However by 1970, both Turcios Lima and Yon Sosa, the most effective insurgent leaders, were dead. The final blow came in 1972 when the entire insurgent central committee disappeared. The remaining insurgents were so "leaderless, broken, and so concerned with mere survival" that they could not operate effectively. (5)

#### THE GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The Guatemalan government developed an effective strategy which succeeded in meeting the insurgent threat as it developed and changed. During the early 1960s the President Peralta Azurdia's regime considered the insurgents as mere bandits, reacting to their actions with army, militia, and police responses. However, by 1966 the insurgents had become so effective they were a campaign issue in the March elections. (6)

The new President, Mendez Montenegro, first offered the insurgents amnesty, but when this was rejected a three part government strategy was developed and implemented. "First, the regular army units would attempt to destroy the main force guerrilla units; second, the militia forces would provide local security and attempt to destroy guerrilla infrastructure; and third, the government would initiate a serious civic action program." (7)

After an intensive training period assisted by U.S. Army trainers, regular army forces began field operations. Working with the regular forces, irregular forces consisting mostly of small landowners both conducted military operations and gathered intelligence. (8) In addition to the overt irregular forces, the Government also responded to the insurgent threat by countenancing right wing death squads. One of the most active of these groups, the Organized National Anticommunist Movement (MANO), better known as White Hand, tortured and assassinated left leaning Guatemalans and peasants believed to sympathize with the insurgents. (9)

Richard Gott, writing in his book Guerrilla Movements, describes the results of the strategy in the rural areas:

This was an area...in which the guerrillas had been active for five years or more. Yet, faced by a systematic military push, and the use of informers, civic action programs, and the indiscriminate methods of attack which led to huge casualties among innocent peasants, the guerrillas soon found themselves very much on the defensive, and forced to adopt a strategy of mobility. (10)

When the insurgents moved their operations to the urban areas in 1967, the government reacted by increasing the size of the police force by 2,000 men while simultaneously providing this organization with better training. Again, the United States helped by providing funds to support police training. Intelligence operations were greatly improved while army forces also operated in the cities. Periodically, a state of siege was declared when suspects could be arrested without formal charges. Vigilante killings increased. After the 1970 state of siege was lifted in November, 1971, left wing

insurgent operations almost ceased. (11) Vincente Collazo-Davila explains how and why the Guatemalan strategy was effective, saying:

In summation it must be said that the Guatemalan government took strong, decisive action beginning in mid-1966 and that it adjusted its strategy as the insurgents varied theirs. The government successfully differentiated among the various types of threats and replied with various countermeasures based on a coordinated political, administrative, military, police, and intelligence effort. U.S. aid... would not have been decisive without a Guatemalan government totally dedicated to the task at hand. The government made good use of counterinsurgency doctrine and in fact added a new twist with the widespread use of the covert terror groups. (12)

### CONCLUSIONS

Although the Guatemalan government had effectively stopped the insurgency, the cost in human lives was significant. Estimates of those killed by the vigilante groups vary. Collazo-Davila estimates some 10,000 (13) while the British author, Peter Calvert, estimates at least 3,500, and possibly as many as 15,000 were murdered. (14)

However, there was no widespread civil uprising, no revolt of the moderates, nor was there a significant change in the socioeconomic conditions for the peasants. Thus, while the insurgents were defeated there remained the abject poverty in which so many lived. Also, the military and the large land-holders remained in power.

### END NOTES

1. Vincente Collazo-Davila, "The Guatemalan Insurrection," in Insurgency in the Modern World, ed. by Bard E. O'Neill, et. al., p.110.

2. Ibid., p. 111.

3. Ibid., p. 112.
4. Ibid., pp. 112-113.
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6. Ibid., p. 115.
7. Ibid., pp. 115-116.
8. Ibid., p. 116.
9. U.S. Department of the Army, DA pam 550-78, Guatemala: A Country Study, p. 30.
10. Vincente Collazo-Davilla, p. 116.
11. Ibid., p. 119.
12. Ibid., p. 120.
13. Ibid., p. 120.
14. Peter Calvert, Guatemalan Insurgency and American Security, p. 9.

# THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER IV

### INSURGENTS-THE SECOND GENERATION

The veterans of the guerrilla movement of the 1960s seem to agree that their defeat was in large degree a result of their isolation from the Guatemalan people. (1)

### THE INSURGENTS

One author declares the second generation of insurgency began after the elections of 1974 when the winner, General Ríos Montt, a moderate, was replaced by a more conservative officer, General Kjell Laugerud. (2) However, the two most effective insurgent organizations date their birth as 1971 and 1972. (3) Both of these, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) first began operations in the rural areas of El Quiché Department.

Some of the survivors of the 1960s insurgency traveled to Cuba and other third world countries to study. Returning, they joined with new revolutionaries to form the EGP. After analyzing the failures of the past, they developed a new strategy which involved four pillars. They planned for a prolonged struggle, would establish a base and infrastructure in a rural area, would involve the Indians in the struggle, and would establish an international front. (4) Organizing for three years, their first major political action, the "opening shot of the popular war," came in 1975 with the execution of a plantation owner known as the Tiger of Ixcán. (5)

Like the EGP, the ORPA initially spent years organizing an infrastructure. Quietly building strength by enlisting Indians in the

mountains while also organizing in the urban areas, the ORPA did not publicly reveal its organization and aims until 1979. (6)

During the period from 1977 through 1979, insurgent operations were mainly terrorist type operations which included kidnaping, assassinations and bombings. Targets included serving and retired military and security personnel, politicians, government officials, businessmen, landowners, and former insurgents who had become informers and traitors. (7)

As the insurgents gained strength they began to implement more difficult operations. In 1981 and 1982 their operations were designed to cast doubts on the governments ability to maintain control and to govern. (8) Attempting to disrupt the economy, they unleashed a bombing campaign which damaged or destroyed economic, transportation, and communication infrastructure and threatened the tourist industry. In addition, by 1982 they had significantly increased their attacks on security forces, were operating in all but three of Guatemala's twenty-two Departments and in the capitol, were able to deny portions of three Departments to security forces, and even were able to seize a Department capitol only about sixty miles from the nation's capitol. (9)

Targeting the economic sector as a source of funds, they "kidnaped local and foreign businessmen for large ransoms...and forced many commercial vehicle owners to pay a 'revolutionary tax' (protection money) to guarantee their safety." (10)

To further implement their strategy, the insurgents developed a political program designed to win approval from both Guatemalans and

the international community. Sounding much like what the Sandinistas had promised, the program called for: an "end to repression; social and economic changes, including land redistribution; free elections; freedom of political and religious association; an end to forced recruitment into the army; and non-alignment internationally." (11)

Despite the insurgents' appeal to the international community, their support from this source was probably limited. Dr. Caesar D. Sereseres, in writing "Lessons from Central America's Revolutionary Wars," argues that Cuba forced the four major Guatemalan insurgent organizations to agree to form the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) as "the price of assistance from abroad, especially Cuba." (12) Michael S. Radu, in his study of Insurgent and Terrorist Groups in Latin America, states that while most funds come from Guatemalan sources, some contributions also come from Cuba, Nicaragua, Libya, and the Soviet block, while some weapons and other materials also are obtained from Communist regimes. (13) David Charters and Maurice Tugwell, in their report entitled Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Central America, relate that although the Guatemalan government has "made much of alleged Cuban and Soviet support for the insurgents, the public record...is sketchy," while further arguing that Cuba's help in getting the insurgents to form an alliance, may prove in the end to be the most vital outside assistance the insurgents ever have received. (14) In summary, although past outside assistance was limited, future assistance from Cuba and Nicaragua can be expected.

Thus, despite government and right-wing extremist efforts, by 1982



the insurgent forces included an estimated 3,000(15) to 6,000 fighters and many more supporting personnel, and had become a significant political and military force in Guatemala.(16)

### THE EXTREME RIGHT

Unlike the insurgents, the extreme right entered the 1970s in superb condition. Although not very active in the early 1970s after the earlier urban insurgency had been quelled, their activities also began to increase in the mid to late 1970s in response to increased insurgent activities.(17) While the government had always denied all reports linking it to those extreme right-wing groups dispensing their own forms of lethal "justice" against those they suspected of being communist, many authors suspect the rightists were at least condoned by the government. Richard Millett, a professor of history, summarizes the thoughts of others when he asserts that the government lacked the "ability and or the will to control" this internal violence.(18)

These right-wing groups, also referred to as death squads or vigilante groups, operated by kidnaping and murdering those suspected of supporting leftist causes or opposing the regime. Their targets included: "...university personnel, teachers and students; professional men, such as lawyers and doctors; trade union leaders and members; journalists (including foreigners); moderate politicians and local administrators; priests, nuns and lay workers; and Indian peasants."(19) While estimates vary, Charters and Tugwell report that rightists were responsible for 105 murders in 1977, and as insurgent

violence continued to grow, accounted for 3,000 murders in 1980 and three times that number in 1981. (20) However, they admit that it was seldom possible to fix the blame for any particular murder, as most killings were not claimed by either the insurgents or the right.

### THE GOVERNMENT

Even though the level of violence on both the right and the left grew after the 1974 elections, in 1977 the Guatemalan government was secure enough to abrogate its military assistance pact with the "...United States as a protest against the human rights pressures of the Carter administration." (21) The violence during President Eugenio Kjell Laugerud's administration continued, culminating in the massacre of 100 protesting Indians in May, 1978. (22)

There were hopes that the new administration of General Romeo Lucas García, who was inaugurated in July of 1978, could stop the growing violence through national dialogue and reconciliation. (23) However, this was not to be. As already described, the level of violence continued to escalate. Charters and Tugwell declare there was no apparent strategy, save terror. Going further, they also explained that "...if there was a philosophy at all, it was to punish the civilians for the activities of the leftist guerrillas." (24)

During the 1982 presidential elections Guatemala was isolated internationally, without U.S. aid, and under an unprecedented reign of terror. (25) Citing election fraud after the voting was completed, junior officers removed President Lucas García and installed a junta headed by General Ríos Montt, (26) who since his ouster in 1974 had

remained out of politics, devoting much of his energies serving as a leader of a fundamentalist Protestant church. (27)

In one of his early statements, the new president provided an assessment of Guatemalan security and its threats that was to guide his strategy against the insurgents. In summary, he stated that security rests on a foundation of trust between the people and the state, admitted that the government had been corrupt and thus had failed to provide this foundation, admitted that Guatemala was not a functional democracy, and further stated that "we" are here to institutionalize the state while helping those in need. (28)

#### THE STRATEGY

During the month of June, the new government offered amnesty to insurgents and government forces who had broken the law during the counterinsurgency efforts. However, the actual number of insurgents that surrendered is in question, as the government claimed more than 1,800 while other estimates place the number at closer to 150. (29)

The new Guatemalan counterinsurgency campaign, Victoria '82, when launched in July, consisted of a three point strategy. (30) The first element was to strengthen the military so it could fight the insurgent in the rural areas. To start, the army chief of staff improved "...command and control in the planning, implementing and monitoring of military operations..." and mobilized 5,000 reservists and former military men to strengthen the force." (31) Then, tactical combat groups were established in Chimaltenango, Quiché, and Huehuetanango Departments. From group field headquarters, small patrols were sent

out to gain control of all or portions of nine highland Departments while the army also established a military presence in the isolated highland villages. To guide the military, while at the same time improving relations with noncombatants, a military code of conduct was developed. (32)

A Special Operations Command, commanded by an army officer, but established in Guatemala City by the National Police, provided a special weapons and tactics team for use in the city and rapid strike forces for use in rural areas. (33)

In addition, as in the early 1970s, a state of siege was implemented which gave the government and the army draconian powers. For instance, travel was restricted, union and political activity was banned, the armed forces were given arrest powers, and the right of habeas corpus was denied. Also, the media was prohibited from broadcasting or printing information about subversion or countersubversion unless it was provided by an authorized public relations agency. (34)

The second element of the strategy called for the establishment of civilian defense forces (CDFs) in highland villages. (35) Locals from each village were organized to patrol their villages, protect them from insurgents, and to gather information on and report observed insurgent activities. A chain of command tied each patrol to the local military commander. Sereseres states that the CDFs were not just paramilitary organizations, but also a local political organization which could counter the insurgent cadre. (36) The government

organizers furnished a small number of weapons to each patrol unit, but many patrols used their own weapons, usually knives, machetes, or sticks, and training was limited. (37) CDF patrollers were not paid. However, by participating they helped convince the local authorities that they were not insurgents and were also perhaps too busy to assist the insurgents.

However, all the CDF patrollers did not freely volunteer to join this organization. Jonathan Fried, a reporter of Central American affairs, stated that the army forced the Indians to participate by threatening to destroy their property and to kill them if they didn't. (38) Millett also declares that patrol members were "persuaded or coerced" to join the CDF. (39)

The third element of the counterinsurgency strategy was to "initiate a socioeconomic plan in the zones of conflict, a tactic reminiscent of the military's successful civic action programs against the guerrillas in the 1960s." (40) Leading this effort, which served to establish trust between the government and the Indians, was the National Reconstruction Committee, which provided food and social assistance while also coordinating small development projects. (41) Many Indians were also moved into strategic hamlets, built in secure areas to resettle inhabitants of insecure areas or those whose homes had been destroyed or those displaced by the fighting. (42)

Others report resettlement actions were hardly executed so as to build trust between the Indians and the government. Jim Handy, reporting in the Journal of Latin American Studies, even charges that the creation of model villages was accomplished through a series of

massacres and forced relocations. (43) Pope John Paul II, when visiting Guatemala in March, 1983, asked the government to protect the Indians and to halt the "flagrant injustices" in the country. Perhaps he did this because of an earlier statement of the Guatemalan bishops which charged the government with continued human rights abuses and the destruction of the Indian culture. (44)

Sereseres reported on the campaign saying:

The Victoria '82 campaign lasted for less than six months. It was during this time--with a mobilized and expanded army fighting in small units throughout the highlands, with the support of several hundred thousand CDF patrulleros (civil patrolman) and the CRN, which assisted 300,000 rural inhabitants directly effected by the violence--that deaths rose sharply and that several thousand refugees arrived in Mexico." (45)

Jim Handy called the campaign "incredibly brutal," but never-the-less also reported:

The campaign was tremendously successful. While the guerrilla forces suffered few defeats in actual battles, this forced relocation mopped up the sea of peasant support making it impossible for the peasants to aid the guerrilla armies. By the summer of 1983, with much of the highland population settled in model villages or strategic hamlets and over 700,000 residents forced to participate in civil patrols, the immediate threat of a guerrilla victory had effectively ended." (46)

With their rural support network in shambles, and pursued by the government forces, most of the remaining insurgents either went into hiding or fled into the Guatemala-Mexico border region. In addition, many Indians displaced by the fighting also fled to this border region. (47)

Perhaps Sereseres best describes the reasons both the government and the insurgents continue to try to mobilize the Indians when he

argues "...that the loyalty of the rural inhabitants will ultimately determine the outcome of the Guatemalan internal war." (48)

The Guatemalan government was accused of massive human rights violations during the campaign. Amnesty International reported the deaths of 2,600 peasants during the first six months of General Montt's regime. (49) This large number of noncombatant, civilian casualties, and the publicized executions of those convicted in secret trials, did not help the Guatemalan government gain the respect of the international community. (50) As a result of its negative image, Guatemala was unable to obtain military aid from the United States until 1985, and then only \$300,000 in military training funds. (51)

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3. Mario Payeras, "The Tiger of Ixcán," in Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished Business, ed. by Jonathan L. Fried, et. al., pp. 264-270.

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5. Mario Payeras, p. 264.

6. Ibid., pp. 264-271.

7. Charters and Tugwell, p. 150.

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10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., pp. 151-152.
12. Sereseres, p. 171.
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32. Ibid., p. 173.



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39. Richard Millett, "Guatemala: Painful Progress," Current History, December 1986, p. 415.
40. Sereseres, p. 173.
41. Ibid.
42. Handy, p. 402-403.
43. Handy, p. 403.
44. U.S. Department of the Army, p. 215.
45. Sereseres, p. 173.
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47. Sereseres, p. 174.
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50. Ibid.
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# THE GUATEMALAN COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The political object, as the original motive of war, should be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made. Carl Von Clausewitz (1)

After reviewing the Guatemalan counterinsurgency efforts, we return now to the original questions. First, has the Guatemalan strategy to defeat their insurgency been successful? If so, then what lessons may be learned by those who will be assigned to assist countries who are also fighting such small wars?

Linda Robinson may be correct when she declares the Guatemalan army has won its war against the insurgents. However, my review of this case, and my reading of history produces yet another conclusion, one that mirrors Seresere's. Specifically, the Guatemalans have militarily broken the insurgents, but the political struggle goes on. (2)

By 1986 the insurgents were reduced to a few "focos" in the highlands and the Petén jungle. (3) However, just as the insurgents were militarily defeated in the early 1970s, and managed to rise from defeat to again become a formidable threat in the late 1970s, those that remain today retain this ability and in time will rally others to their cause. Why? Because the basic social, political and economic inequities remain today much as they existed in the 1960s. This despite continuing civic action programs and the country's move toward democracy with the election of the first civilian president in over two decades. (4)

Therefore, perhaps the best that can be said for the Guatemalan strategy is that for almost three decades the insurgents have been prevented from progressing to conventional warfare and today remain little stronger militarily than when they initially began military operations. This is no small accomplishment, since the insurgents remain unable to dominate the country, thus little closer to their goal than when they began. Also, the Guatemalans appear to be more successful than the Salvadorans, who still depend on massive American assistance, and have less control of their insurgents.

Yet, the Guatemalan strategy in its entirety cannot be recommended to Americans who will advise others because some elements are not culturally, legally, or morally acceptable. Therefore, further analysis is needed.

Probably most repugnant was the failure of the government to quash the death squads. These massive violations of human rights, even if not organized by the government, could not have reasonably occurred for such an extended period of time without being condoned. For even while fighting an insurgency, a government must still minimize the use of violence. At the same time the government must remain responsive to the rights of its people to be charged and tried for suspected crimes as dictated by the law. However, death squads were not part of the country's legal system. So instead of being condoned, they should have been fought as vigorously as were the insurgents. Thus, even if death squad activities were not conducted as part of the Guatemalan strategy, the government had a responsibility to put them out of

business. This it failed to do, even as late as 1986. (5) Therefore, there is a valid argument that the government's continued failure to deal with the death squads, to thus condon this lawlessness, harmed its legitimacy both at home and internationally.

In both periods of insurgency, (the first from 1963-1971 and the second from 1974-1983) the government offered the insurgents an amnesty. However, the results were less than encouraging. The limited success achieved the first time can probably be attributed to the fact that the insurgent forces were simply small. However, in 1982 the reason was probably that the insurgents believed that to accept the amnesty was to accept death. This because some insurgents who had voluntarily surrendered earlier had been subsequently killed by the death squads.

Thus, the lesson is clear. Before offering amnesty, the government must be both willing and able to assure those who accept amnesty are treated fairly and reintegrated into society. An amnesty program that once loses its credibility has little chance of continuing success.

One of the Guatemalan success stories was their ability to mobilize their Army and other paramilitary forces to counter the insurgent military organization. During the first period, training of regular units, organization of militia forces, coordination of intelligence from both Army and police sources, combined with the state of siege, enabled the government to separate the insurgents from their base areas and thus effectively neutralize the insurgent fighters in the countryside. Later, after the insurgents had

reorganized to operate as terrorists in the cities, the government was again able to destroy their ability to operate because the retrained and expanded police forces were able to identify and then neutralize them.

During the second period, the Army and paramilitary forces were again expanded, retrained, and in some instances reorganized while again a state of siege gave these forces greater powers than usual. However, this time a new force, one of the people, was organized to provide local security in and near each village. These civil defense forces were a new idea, and one that paid great dividends at little cost. By organizing these local forces to provide both a first line of defense and intelligence, the government gave each village a stake in its security while simultaneously tremendously increasing the number of people working for it. When the number of civil patrollers reached 700,000 in 1983, this force was about 10 per cent of the population of Guatemala, and about fourteen times as large as the army and other security forces.

While charges by Americas Watch that the patrollers were scarcely trained, ill equipped with few and sometimes antiquated weapons, sometimes abused the rights of others, and forced to work without pay probably had merit, this large force--even if all of it was not loyal to the government--had a significant impact on the insurgents, hindering their ability to move freely through the countryside and to obtain support from the populace.

Likewise, the government's strategic hamlet programs and civic action programs were also successes. Again, while these may have been

instituted with more finesse in a less abusive manner, they allowed the government more easily to control and secure the population and to implement civic action programs in areas which could be secured. This, in turn, made it more difficult for the insurgents easily to undo the government's changes.

Yet the real test of the government's civic action and strategic hamlet programs can only be evaluated in time. Did these programs have the long term commitment, financial backing, and vision to assist the displaced Indians to establish a productive new life? The evidence now is not clear. However, the answer is important, because if this was not done then the Indians may again turn to the insurgents.

In summary, the Guatemalan counterinsurgency efforts have been successful and the government remains in power. However the government's use of what we would consider excessive violence may prove, in the future, to have been counterproductive.

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